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## Viewing cable 08KUALALUMPUR575, NAJIB FIGHTS BACK; WEEKEND PROTEST FAILS TO IMPRESS

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### Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

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If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g.

**#08KUALALUMPUR575.**

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
<a href="#">08KUALALUMPUR575</a>	<a href="#">2008-07-07 11:49</a>	<a href="#">2011-08-30 01:44</a>	<a href="#">CONFIDENTIAL</a>	<a href="#">Embassy Kuala Lumpur</a>

Appears in these articles:

<http://malaysia-today.net/mtcolumns/42561-wikileaks-najib-fights-back-weekend-protest-fails-to-impress->

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FM AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1306  
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 0115  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 0435  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 2571  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 KUALA LUMPUR 000575

SIPDIS

FOR EAP AND INR

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/07/2028  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [MY](#)

SUBJECT: NAJIB FIGHTS BACK; WEEKEND PROTEST FAILS TO IMPRESS

REF: A. KUALA LUMPUR 572 - NAJIB IMPLICATED IN MURDER  
    1B. KUALA LUMPUR 570 - GOM DELIVERS PROTEST TO USG  
    1C. KUALA LUMPUR 563 - ANWAR ON OFFENSIVE  
    1D. KUALA LUMPUR 557 - ANWAR TAKES REFUGE  
    1E. KUALA LUMPUR 73 - PROSECUTOR DOWNBEAT ON MURDER  
        CASE  
    1F. 07 KUALA LUMPUR 291 - ALTANTUYA MURDER

Classified By: Political Section Chief Mark D. Clark, reason 1.4 (b and d).

#### Summary

1. (C) As de facto Opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim went on the offensive last week, Deputy Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak wasted no time in denying any link to the Altantuya murder case, while diffusing another bombshell by admitting he previously had met the man accusing Anwar of sodomy. On July 4, the private investigator who had implicated Najib in the murder case sat by silently as a lawyer read out a retraction of his statement publicized only 24 hours earlier. The rising political boil led to rumors of potential arrest for Anwar the night of July 3. A major Opposition political rally in the Kuala Lumpur vicinity failed to attract critical mass, as some supporters took heed of police warnings and talk of using the military to ensure order. U.S. remarks related to the allegations against Anwar continued to generate opportunistic GOM criticism, including a letter from Foreign Minister Rais Yatim to the Secretary. Prime Minister Abdullah felt it necessary to announce that his government is stable, in the face of rumors to the contrary, while UMNO leaders prepared themselves for party elections. A key lieutenant for Anwar Ibrahim assessed that PM Abdullah did not support use of emergency measures against the Opposition at this time, and said Anwar would continue with public rallies. End Summary.

Najib: I Met Anwar's Accuser, But Not Altantuya

2. (C) DPM Najib wasted little time in defending himself publicly following Anwar's July 3 press conference featuring private investigator Balasubramaniam and his explosive sworn statement linking Najib to the murder of Mongolian national Altantuya. Speaking with reporters, Najib explicitly denied ever meeting Altantuya, and suggested Anwar's public revelations were an attempt to distract the public from the sodomy allegations against the Opposition leader. Najib, however, admitted that he had met Anwar's accuser, Saiful Bukhari Azlan, who had come to Najib's home several days before filing a police complaint, but this did not reflect a conspiracy. In a July 30 interview, Najib had insisted he was not involved in the case at all, while Opposition sources told us they had evidence and witnesses to the contrary (suggesting to us that Najib corrected the public record in order to preempt another disclosure by Anwar).

#### ISA Fears

3. (C) In the immediate aftermath of the private investigator's statement tying Najib to the Mongolian murder victim, swirling rumors regarding Opposition protests, and public statements by the police alluding to a possible role for the military in maintaining order, Opposition sources told us Anwar feared he could be arrested under the Internal Security Act (ISA) as early as the evening of July 3. As a precaution, Anwar completed a number of legal declarations with his lawyer during the July 3 afternoon. To mitigate risks that the planned July 6 anti-government rally could provide a pretext for a security crackdown, the Opposition decided to shift the venue from an open park to an enclosed stadium in Shah Alam in line with a request from police.

Investigator's 24-Hour Turn-Around

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¶4. (C) Najib's camp appeared to conduct a major counterstrike on July 4, as Balasubramaniam sat in a hastily arranged press conference beside a lawyer who read out a retraction of the private investigator's statement that he publicized only 24 hours earlier. The PI's new statutory declaration refutes all allegations connected to Najib, explicitly repeating each of the statements now declared false, and states that the earlier affidavit was completed under duress. Balasubramaniam remained silent and glum in the quick press encounter, in contrast to his open demeanor the previous day. His about-face occurred after being called to a police station on July 3, shortly after the Anwar press conference. Following his retraction, Balasubramaniam with his immediate family disappeared from public view, with some rumors that he is abroad.

#### Tepid Turnout for Key Rally

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¶5. (C) Rumored plans by the Opposition to stage a protest march in Kuala Lumpur on July 4 after Friday Muslim prayers failed to materialize, though police briefing detained two activists at the National Mosque. Anwar traveled to Opposition-held Penang on Saturday, July 5, to preside over an Opposition rally there which drew an estimated 30,000 supporters. The big Opposition event, however, was slated for Sunday, July 6, in Shah Alam in Selangor state, also in Opposition hands. Police issued warnings regarding the illegal nature of the July 6 rally, and set up road-blocks in the vicinity, actions that deterred attendance; however, police did not otherwise attempt to stop the event. The all-day affair, at one time billed as a "million-man" rally, attracted only a modest turnout of some 20,000, less than the 50,000 capacity of the stadium. Anwar exhorted the crowd to throw out PM Abdullah's National Front (BN), but did not mention his earlier deadline of September 16 to bring down the government through the defection of BN members of parliament. The greatest stir of the rally came earlier in the day when a rock band singer flashed his buttocks to the audience during a performance, outraging the crowd and causing some conservative Muslim participants from the Islamist PAS party to abandon the stadium.

#### U.S. Remarks in the Mix

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¶6. (SBU) GOM and UMNO party officials continued to criticize both the U.S. and Anwar over the State Department Spokesman's June 30 remarks affirming our support for rule of law in light of the sodomy allegations against the Opposition leader. Foreign Minister Rais Yatim over the weekend confirmed that he had sent a letter of protest to Secretary Rice over U.S. interference in Malaysia's internal affairs. Home Minister Syed Hamid Albar called Anwar America's "snitch." Education Minister and UMNO Youth leader Hishammuddin said the UMNO Youth wing would protest at the U.S. Embassy, as well as at the Turkish embassy (for sheltering Anwar June 29-30) and the Singapore high commission (for articles published in Singapore critical of DPM Najib's wife, Rosmah). Some 40-50 persons, purportedly from the Muslim Consumers Association, demonstrated briefly and peacefully at the U.S. Embassy on July 4; some carried signs equating the U.S. and Anwar with Zionism. (Note: We forwarded the Foreign Minister's July 4 letter to EAP/MTS. Despite the high-level criticism, we enjoyed good Malaysian official turnout at our Independence Day reception, held on July 3. End Note.)

#### Prime Minister: Everything Under Control

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¶7. (SBU) With the political scene buffeted by the Anwar-Najib maelstrom, and respected international media beginning to remark on Malaysia's "turmoil," as did the Asian Wall Street Journal, Prime Minister Abdullah tried to publicly reassure citizens and the international community

alike. On July 3, Abdullah publicly stressed, "this government is a stable government, please believe that.... Don't panic about what is happening." On July 6, the PM's comments turned more defense and emotional, as he hit out at "rampant" "slandering" and Opposition protests. "I don't see the rationale for the continued demonstrations, or to play politics purely to create instability that could jeopardize the people's safety and it is also aimed at toppling the government elected by the people," Abdullah told reporters.

#### UMNO in Election Mode

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¶8. (SBU) Meanwhile, PM Abdullah's dominant UMNO party officially begins its election cycle in 10 days time, with the first phase, party branch elections, scheduled July 17-August 24. Most senior UMNO leaders are devoting increasing time, particularly their weekends, to contact work with their respective party branches and divisions. While elections for the presidency, deputy presidency and other national leadership positions do not take place until December, successful candidates must lay the ground work now to ensure their nominations later in the process. For example, internet journalists reported on July 7 that all 13 UMNO division leaders in Abdullah's home state of Penang had already decided to nominate Abdullah for reelection as party president, a move supposedly intended to forestall a push by Najib's supporters.

#### Down from the Boiling Point, for Now

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¶9. (C) Polchief met on July 7 with Sivarasa Rasiah, vice president in Anwar's Peoples Justice Party (PKR) and one of Anwar's lawyers. Sivarasa said last week's political scene was volatile and "boiling," but the situation now had calmed down to a "simmer." He downplayed the immediate risk of the GOM employing emergency measures, such as ISA detention for Anwar and other opposition leaders, in large part because he believed PM Abdullah was not supportive of such measures at this stage. Even though the police could arrest and hold Anwar for a period of 60 days, Abdullah would need to be on board with the decision. Second, Sivarasa argued that use of ISA against Anwar also entailed a willingness to declare a state of emergency to contain and tamp down street protests that would erupt, a step that again Abdullah, but also the King and fellow traditional rulers and perhaps the security forces were not backing at this time.

¶10. (C) Sivarasa said Anwar would continue holding rallies, particularly in Opposition-held states, but would be careful to minimize the risk of these getting out of hand and creating a pretext for harsh government action. Sivarasa acknowledged that in the July 6 rally Anwar had not mentioned his now famous September 16 deadline for bringing down the BN government, and Sivarasa appeared to imply that this date did not reflect a particular plan, at least not one that he was privy to. Sivarasa downplayed the possibility of Anwar contesting in a by-election in the near future.

¶11. (C) The PKR VP and lawyer thought that the police investigation into the sodomy allegations against Anwar had failed to turn up enough information for prosecutors to justify an actual indictment, though the police would never speak up to clear Anwar's name and the allegations, or an open investigation, would linger. Sivarasa stated that private investigator Balasubramaniam had confided in him, along with a number of others, some two months ago regarding information linking Najib to the Altantuya murder case. Anwar would bring forward these witnesses to Balasubramaniam's remarks when needed.

#### Comment

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¶12. (C) Last week's palatable political tension, stoked by Anwar's offensive in face of the sodomy investigation and GOM counterattacks, has receded somewhat as of today. The

under-attended Opposition rally of July 6, considered by itself, failed to impress or convey a sense of popular momentum. BN leaders, Najib in particular, have been quick to conclude that the rally's failure to attract a packed crowd reflects a lack of support for Anwar. Police warnings and reference to bringing in the military to ensure order no doubt dampened enthusiasm among Opposition supporters. The political status quo threatens Anwar and plays into Najib's hands, however, suggesting that the Opposition leader will come out with fresh challenges to the BN government.

¶13. (C) Najib and UMNO may have suffered longer term blows to their public credibility in the exchange of allegations with Anwar. Detailed revelations about Najib, even retracted the next day, will tend confirm the widespread public belief that the DPM is linked to the Altantuya murder. The allegations against Anwar, however, appear as a repeat of the politically-motivated charges of 1998, even to those who put some stock in the reports. For Najib this comes at the inopportune time with the start of the UMNO election cycle, and will dampen the possibility his camp can generate enough grassroots backing for a Najib bid to replace Abdullah as party leader come December.

KEITH